DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 157 321 EC 111 806

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TITLE A Proposal for an International Special Education Television Network.
PUB DATE Jun 78
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the World Congress on Future Special Education (First, Stirling, Scotland, June 27 - July 1, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Satellites; Elementary Secondary Education; *Handicapped Children; *International Educational Exchange; *Media Technology; Special Education

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A PROPOSAL FOR AN INTERNATIONAL SPECIAL EDUCATION TELEVISION NETWORK

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Description: Future Technology

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The utilization of satellites in combination with university and public broadcast facilities throughout the world can be coordinated as a Worldwide Special Education Television Network. The purpose of the Network would be to provide relatively easy access to new research developments, events, teaching techniques, and ideas that will allow different areas of the globe to exchange information quickly and accurately. The technology currently exists for the development of the Network, but the primary obstacles appear to be cost, international regulation, and intransigence within the field of Special Education.

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A PROPOSAL FOR AN INTERNATIONAL SPECIAL EDUCATION TELEVISION NETWORK

A problem with world advancement in any professional field is that industrialized countries are able to digest and develop new ideas at a rate that will put them increasingly, almost exponentially, ahead of the poorest nations of the world. The purpose of Special Education is the improvement of functioning levels of handicapped people, and thus new ideas to help the handicapped must be communicated and developed on a worldwide basis, so that the poorer nations of the globe do not become repositories for handicapping conditions that may be either eliminated or "normalized" in future "advanced" countries. In fact, those of us who are concerned with worldwide conditions for human beings need to recognize that the "advanced" countries I am referring to may be somewhat different in the next quarter century. The current inability of "poor" countries to get sufficient food to expectant mothers causes physical impairment or brain damage to about ten million infants per year. Growing Third/Fourth World pressures for improved living conditions will become economic possibilities as natural resources of those "poor" countries are developed (Shane, 1976). Thus, some "poor" countries may become "rich". For people in Special Education, the crucial issue is how to

communicate information from already industrialized nations to countries moving from the "poor" to "rich" categories.

Specifically, I am proposing that a Worldwide Special Education Television Network (SETN) be set up as a part of an international consortium of nations that might develop from this First World Congress on Future Special Education. The purpose of the Network would be to produce broadcast material that would be designed specifically to help populations in need of information and training. The notion of "utilization of the airwaves" would extend beyond a purely communicative function to actual skill development. For example, a series of broadcasts on behavior modification techniques might be transmitted in the native language of some remote area of the world so that people in need do not have to wait for the latest issue of a professional journal. Further, future technology will allow two-way audio-visual communication to take place, so that feedback from viewer to broadcaster, and broadcaster to viewer, could be immediate. Perhaps most important, though, is the idea that large numbers of people can be trained at one time. From a social perspective, differences in language, handicaps (social, mental, physical), and differing political ideologies would not create any problem other than those posed by technology, since the purpose of the SETN would be the benefit of mankind.

Several questions and answers are important in the development of a SETN:

Q. Is a Special Education Television Network consistent with the goals of the fields of Special Education?

A. Yes. A Special Education Television Network, as part of a consortium or "world body", could serve as the disseminator of research knowledge and the translation medium for turning research into application. Utilization of television could provide a mechanism for intercultural, interinstitutional, and multidisciplinary study and cooperation between all nations of the world.

Q. Is the technology available to effect broadcast needs?

A. Absolutely. Satellites and utilization of production centers (both public and academic) could take care of technological needs. Any areas of the world that would present technological problems could become special projects of a group like the consortium suggested in this paper, or the United Nations, so that technology itself would at worst only be a practical problem. Even in 1978, people throughout the world can visually walk on the moon, watch the Olympic games, attend a Presidential funeral, or see a live discussion on new developments in Special Education. In 1977, approximately 50% of the world population viewed television. Thus, because of television's capacity for producing instant rage, anger, imitation, or demand, we are

talking about an already existing technology that has the capacity to change the world (Platt, 1975). Why not adapt that technology for helping people in need?

Q. Has research and/or application of such a project been done on a smaller scale?

A. Yes. The Children's Television Workshop, producers of "Sesame Street" and "The Electric Company" have developed, in my opinion, generally excellent learning packages for specific populations. My own research indicates that utilization of television with handicapped populations, including the legally blind, has enormous potential. But I want to insure that readers understand that I am not talking only about directly helping handicapped people. I am referring to every aspect of work even peripherally involved with Special Education. Suppose someone in Denmark were to develop a new management technique that was a significant cost saver for institutions for the mentally retarded. Why not pass that information on to administrators of similar institutions in New Zealand, Kansas, and Argentina, through use of an International Television channel reserved for the field?

Q. What are the most immediate problems involved with developing a Special Education Television Network?

A. First, there are several technical difficulties. Different technologies, such as broadband and cable, currently

provide different services. When new world markets develop, the resolution of who is to do what, and at what cost, could create tremendously complex difficulties (Shooshan, 1978). For example, if other fields are to be entitled to satellite time, channels for use, hardware, and production time, who is to decide whether Special Education or Cancer Research will receive priority? Second, there is the problem of regulation. With programs crossing international boundaries, how do we determine broadcast hours, censorship policies, sponsorship policies, and general distribution? Third, and to me probably the most serious difficulty with the development of a SETN, is the field of Special Education. I find very little encouragement or interest for new ideas coming from the field itself. Those of us who work professionally in Special Education need to wake up. We often display a 1950's mentality in a technologically advanced world. Look at the journals and conventions in Special Education. Many fine innovative and creative ideas are often lost in the endless reviews of literature and rehashing of esoterica that is, by itself, useless information. We need to look at Special Education as a vital and dynamic part of world life, and that to effect something like a Worldwide Television Network, we need to become involved in economics, technology, politics, and business.

In order to be successful, a Special Education Television Network requires input of the highest professional caliber in both television technology and the disciplines associated with Special Education. This marriage of academic and technical expertise could serve as a focal point for the future of Special Education. I suggest that out of this First World Congress, an international study group should be developed to research and implement the SETN. The need is obvious, the technology exists, and with a little work, the financing is possible. What are we waiting for?

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